

When Vaginas Speak Chinese: Mobilizing Feminism through Translation

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ABSTRACT

As a cross-cultural activity, translation is central to feminist praxis. To examine the dynamics of translation, Taiwanese gender politics, and cultural mobility of feminist discourses, I investigate two Chinese translations of *The Vagina Monologues* published in Taiwan. In the first part of my article, I compare the political and institutional contexts in which the two different Mandarin Chinese translations were produced, discuss how Eve Ensler's play was first introduced to Taiwan in 2000 by Ch'en Ts'ang-to as an initiative against gender-based violence, and explain why it was retranslated by Ting Fan and Ch'iao Se-fen in 2014. In the second part, I draw on select examples from those two translations to analyze how the two groups of translators represent subversive female bodies and sexualities in the Chinese language. By conducting the cross-analysis, I argue that translation, as a nuanced form of feminist activism, facilitates the dissemination and circulation of feminist awareness in cross-cultural encounters.

Keywords: activism, cultural mobility, feminist translation, Taiwan, *The Vagina Monologues*, women's movements

1. Introduction

During the last two decades, there have been multiple discussions about the intersection of feminism and translation, from the early gender-conscious model reflected in feminist translation studies (Chamberlain 1988; Simon 1996; von Flotow 1997) to recent scholarship that reconceptualizes translation as a form of “intersectional feminist activism” (Castro and Ergun 2017:2). Despite the growing scholarly attention devoted to feminist translation praxis in the Global South (Larkosh 2011; von Flotow and Farahzad 2017; Castro and Ergun 2017), Sinophone countries/regions still remain a peripheral, if not “practically unknown” (Santaemilia 2011:23), geography in the global landscape of the women/translation interdiscipline. In this paper, I trace the development of two Taiwanese feminist waves and investigate two Mandarin Chinese translations of *The Vagina Monologues* published in Taiwan. In the first part, I compare the contexts in which two different Mandarin translations were produced, discuss how Eve Ensler’s 1998 play was first introduced in Taiwan by Ch’en Ts’ang-to in 2000 and contributed to the second-wave Taiwanese feminist movements, and explore why it was retranslated by Ting Fan and Ch’iao Se-fen¹ in 2014. In the second part, I draw on select examples from these two translations to analyze how the two groups of translators treat female bodies and sexualities. By analyzing these two different sociohistorical contexts, I argue that translation facilitates the dissemination and circulation of feminist discourses in cross-cultural encounters, challenging the patriarchal codes in Taiwan and raising awareness of gender equality. The comparative contextual and (para-)textual analyses of the two Mandarin translations of *The Vagina Monologues* also reveal that the various forms of feminist intervention effectuated in the target (para-)texts should not be simply equated with “simple alteration of a source text in blind allegiance to [a translator’s] ‘agenda’” (Eshelman 2007:17) or “cumulative improvement in respect of the source text’s portrayal” (Deane-Cox 2014:7). Feminist translation praxis, as it turns out, entails a complex mechanism through which translational agents encounter and negotiate with each other.

¹ In this article, I transliterate names of Taiwanese scholars and translators by using Wade-Giles, except when a different conventional or preferred spelling exists (for instance, Yu Rongjun). The ordering of most Chinese names follows their conventional forms: surname/family name first, except for people who are known by their Anglicized names (for instance, Josephine Ho) or the scholars whose names appear on the covers of their books in a different fashion (for instance, Ya-chen Chen and Zhongli Yu).

2. Translation and two waves of Taiwanese Feminism

As a product of multiple transnational and translational encounters, Taiwanese feminism does not have a linear history. Moreover, to talk about Taiwanese feminism, as Shu-mei Shih reveals, is to “confront potential charges of illegitimacy and inauthenticity” (2015:174). The two signifiers—*Taiwan(ese)* and *feminism*—that constitute the term have long been imbued with “imperial intentions [...] and [...] historically specific determinations” (ibid), with the former subjugated to China’s cultural and military hegemony, thus overshadowed by the centrality of Chineseness, and the latter denoting a universalizing posture of the West regarding local representations. However, Taiwan’s multicultural and multiethnic composition, as well as its ambiguous politico-historical status as a U.S. protectorate, an island nation, a former Japanese colony, and a province that China has been tenaciously claiming as its own, convinces Shih (2015:175-177) to propose that Taiwanese feminism needs to be framed as a transnational formation. Like many other forms of cultural exchanges, the power differentials entering into Taiwanese feminists’ encounters with their counterparts in the Anglophone world or the East Asian “contact nebulae” (Thorner 2009:463) constitute a complex dialectic between the neocolonial and the local. Translation, under the circumstances, assumes the central role in the (trans-)formation of the two waves of Taiwanese feminism: mobilizing feminist knowledge and revealing the geopolitical disparities regarding transnational communication.

It is believed that the first wave of Taiwanese feminism or women’s movement took place during the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945), although historians are still debating whether or not the matrilineal practices in Taiwanese indigenous tribes should be considered an embodiment of Taiwanese feminism. Under Japanese rule, women’s issues became a focal point that manifests the power dynamics between the ingrained Confucian ideology in Taiwan, the Japanese colonizers, and the radical Taiwanese elites. To fortify Japan’s dominance of Taiwan and further exploit its local economy, the colonizers carried out a feet-unbinding campaign² in Taiwan and valorized women’s labor to a great degree, which raised women’s status in the emerging capitalist industry (Yang 2015:140-141). According to Ya-chen Chen (2011:53), they also

² Female feet-binding has long been considered as an embodiment of the patriarchalized Confucian morals. The practice of feet-binding in pre-modern China, as many historians and scholars observe, was usually associated with fetishism, sexual objectification, male domination, and violence against women.

sponsored women's magazines that advocated for women's social engagement, such as 台灣婦人界 *Taiwan furen jie* [*Taiwanese Women's Circle*]. Meanwhile, Taiwanese elites and students who had studied in Japan facilitated the transnational movement of feminist ideas by translating Japanese and Euro-American feminist activist news and texts and publishing them in 台灣青年 *Taiwan qingnian* [*Taiwan Youth*], an anti-imperialist magazine that called for women's liberation and political participation. From 1920 to 1931, a continuum of discussions about Taiwanese feminist issues such as free love, women's education, and women's suffrage arose in Taiwanese society, thanks to the translators of Western and Japanese feminist texts and their activist practices. Their translations, although overshadowed now and then by Japan's colonial surveillance and the Confucian legacy, made Taiwanese readers become aware of women's rights and various forms of feminist activism. By the end of 1931, there were at least ten feminist groups, such as 全國婦女協進會 *Quanguo funü xiejinhui* [National Women's Association for Mutual Assistance and Advancement] and あいこくふじんかい *aikoku fujinkai* [Patriotic Women's Association], across Taiwan in the pursuit of women's liberation in education, family, marriage, and economy (Chang 2009:36-44).

The story of Taiwanese feminism, as Shu-mei Shih points out, is “a story of discontinuity” (2015:179). The second wave of the women's movement in Taiwan did not manifest itself explicitly until 1987 when Chiang Ching-kuo, then President of Taiwan and leader of the *Kuomintang* (also known as the KMT or the Nationalist Party), announced the lifting of martial law. But the lack of presence does not mean that over the four decades following the handover of Taiwan to the KMT, the women's movement in Taiwan came to a complete halt. Scholars such as Ya-chen Chen (2011: 57-58) and Bih-er Chou (2018:116-117) believe that, under the White Terror—suppression of political dissidents following the February 28 Incident³—imposed by the KMT regime, underground human rights and feminist campaigns nevertheless paved the way for the second wave of Taiwanese feminism. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* [*The Second Sex*], one of the most canonical feminist texts, was partly translated into Chinese by Sang Chu-ying and published in Taiwan in 1972. In that same year, feminist scholar and activist

³ Known as 二二八事件 in Chinese, it was an uprising against the high-handed KMT government in 1947. The campaign was soon violently suppressed by the KMT, and Taiwan was placed under martial law hence forth until 1987.

Lü Hsiu-lien, who later became the Vice President of Taiwan in the Ch'en Shui-pien administration from 2000 to 2008, published 新女性主義 *Xin nüxing zhuyi* [A New Feminism], a book initiating discussions that ignited a new women's movement in Taiwan (Chou 2018:116). Since the lifting of martial law, the second wave of Taiwanese feminism has been burgeoning, with more and more Euro-American (non-)feminist thought translated into Chinese. In contrast to the first wave, which was primarily led by Japanese colonizers and Japan-educated students, the second wave—also the current one in Taiwan—has a few particularities. Firstly, institutionalization of women's studies has become a critical manifestation of contemporary feminist movement in Taiwan. Since the first women's studies program was established in 1985 at National Taiwan University, there has been a boom in the emergence of women's/gender studies research programs, institutes, and centers. According to Chou (2018:123), at least twelve universities across Taiwan had been offering women's and gender studies programs by the end of 2014. Secondly, second-wave Taiwanese feminists have more diverse agendas, aiming to extend feminist awareness. Issues such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, and prostitution have become their new concerns. Thirdly, the new wave of Taiwanese feminism also calls for more feminist texts of diversified genres, themes, and styles to be translated into Chinese, so that more courses about gender egalitarianism, non-normative sexualities, and feminism can be created in university curricula, and feminist knowledge, which regards sexual autonomy in particular, can be spread more quickly and effectively.

3. *The Vagina Monologues* goes to Taiwan

The first Mandarin Chinese translation of *The Vagina Monologues* was published in Taiwan in 2000, when second-wave Taiwanese feminism was blooming. It was not by accident that Ensler's radical play about female bodies, sexualities, and women's sexual rights was introduced to the Sinophone world at a time when Taiwanese academia was searching for new ways of constructing knowledge “based on women's experiences” (Chou 2018:117) and grass-roots feminists in Taiwan were carrying out various campaigns to fight sexual harassment and conventional gender roles in a patriarchal society.

Academic feminism in Taiwan has served as a wing of the women's movement for almost four decades. Since the 1980s, the women's studies curriculum has been gradually incorporated into

disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, such as Chinese language and literature, foreign languages and literatures, political science, and sociology. From the 1990s onwards, Taiwanese scholars trained in the West (particularly in the U.S.) helped introduce and translate Euro-American feminist theoretical, literary, and activist texts into Chinese and used them as teaching materials in the newly-added women's and gender studies courses. Among those that were translated and taught in classrooms were Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (translated as 怕飛 *Pa fei* by Mao Yü in 1995), Rosemarie Tong's *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (translated as 女性主義的思潮 *Nüxing zhuyi de sichao* by Tiao Hsiao-hua in 1996), and Patricia T. Clough's *Feminist Thought: Desire, Power and Academic Discourse* (translated as 女性主義思想：慾望、權力及學術論述 *Nüxing zhuyi sixiang: yuwang, quanli ji xueshu lunshu* by Hsia Ch'uan-wei), to name a few. These translations, including the Chinese translation of *The Vagina Monologues* that was published in 2000, enabled local scholars with literary, anthropological, and sociological background to take up less-studied research topics such as Taiwanese comfort women, child brides, and gender roles in the traditional kinship structure. Meanwhile, teaching these translations in classrooms constituted a continuous mechanism of validating feminist awareness in Taiwanese academia and institutionalizing women's and gender studies programs in universities across Taiwan. Although the entrenched academic hierarchy, as Chen reveals in her study of Taiwanese academy's reception of feminist discourse, sought to "hinder the emergent [discipline] from progressing" (2011:93), there were, by the end of 2014, twelve institutions of higher education in Taiwan offering women's and gender studies programs (Chou 2018:123).

The introduction of *The Vagina Monologues* in Taiwan also resonated with the anti-sexual harassment campaign and the women's rights movement that had been going on since 1995. According to Wang Ya-ko (2001:122), from 1995 to 1997, several cases of sexual harassment on campus spurred a wide-scale feminist activist campaign in pursuit of gender equality and a female-friendly working environment. In addition to the multiple crusades organized collectively by feminist groups such as 婦女新知基金會 *Funü xinzhì jījinhui* [Awakening Foundation], Josephine Ho—a feminist activist and the coordinator of the Center for the Study of Sexualities at National Central University—led a radical protest against sexual harassment on campus, during which the participants chanted 只要性高潮，不要性騷擾 *Zhiyao xing gaochao, buyao xing*

saorao [We want orgasm, not sexual harassment]. Evidently, their slogan corresponded to the messages that Eve Ensler tries to compose and send via episodes such as “My Angry Vagina” and “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could”. Retrospectively speaking, the timing of publishing the Chinese translation of *The Vagina Monologues* was nothing short of impeccable, in that the book, together with other practices of second-wave Taiwanese feminism, helped create a public awareness of sexual violence against women and feminist sexual liberation by encouraging ordinary Taiwanese readers to associate their own experience with stories told by people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, and languages. An anonymous reader writes in his/her blog: “我不是學院派, 並不怎麼了解女性主義之類的觀點, 也不是揮舞著一頂女權運動的帽子, 就是單純的喜歡「陰道獨白」帶給我生命的啟發 [I’m not an academic. I’m not that familiar with feminist ideas. Nor am I an activist who participates in every feminist protest. But I simply enjoy what I got from reading *The Vagina Monologues*]” (Yiling 4 March 2006, my translation). He/She makes an analogy a few lines later: “製作過程卻是費了不少的手勁兒和力氣把奶油「打熟」。它是一道極富力量的點心, 如同女人的陰道一樣 powerful [When you’re making tiramisu, you really need to put all your strength into whisking the cream. Fighting for women’s liberation is the same. Your effort makes both the dessert and the vagina powerful]” (ibid., my translation). This particular reader, although not identifying him/herself as a feminist, has clearly been exposed to a feminist effect by reading the translation. Likewise, another reader, having read the Chinese translation of *The Vagina Monologues* several times, expresses her point of view about the un-speakable/un-seeable vaginal politics and what Ensler’s book means to her: “站在女性的立場, 我當然認為有必要好好端詳自己的陰道, 別管他什麼學術理論的解釋, 至少你會因此檢視你跟男人之間的問題 [As a woman, I certainly believe that it is necessary for me to scrutinize my vagina. Forget about theories. They are merely paper talk. You need to get ready to stare gender issues in the eyes]” (賈思琳甜不辣小姐 *Jiasilin tianbula xiaojie* 25 June 2005, my translation). Straightforward as she is, this reader has clearly been inspired by Ensler’s message in the book and thus taken an activist stance. In all, responses like the ones above added to the conversations about women’s empowerment and gender equality that had already been going on in Taiwanese society.

It is true that when the Chinese translation of *The Vagina Monologues* first came out in 2000, it generally corroborated a feminist ideology and popularized the belief of gender equality in Taiwan. This particular translation, however, has been criticized by several scholars for its awkward rendering, the translator's unsympathetic stance, and a lack of feminist intervention. In *Translating Feminism in China: Gender, Sexuality and Censorship*, Zhongli Yu compares the 2000 Taiwanese version, translated by Ch'en Ts'ang-to, with another two Chinese translations of *The Vagina Monologues* published in China a few years later and points out that Ch'en's frequent use of zero translation strategy and his word-for-word rendering are very problematic, because those approaches make the translation "convey the least information to a monolingual reader" (2015:111) and understate the feminist agendas and women's experiences in the original play, thus reducing its vitality. In fact, even general readers have raised concerns over Ch'en's translation. For instance, another anonymous reader shared on an online chatting forum his/her reading response of Ch'en's translation. In it, he/she writes "前陣子看了一本書，叫《陰道獨語》 [...] 我覺得語言上的隔閡還有翻譯上有點問題 [Recently, I've read a book called *Yindao duyue*, which is the Chinese translation of *The Vagina Monologues*. There must be something wrong with the translation, because I feel linguistically estranged]" (EucalyptusJ 10 March 2005, my translation). Apparently, Ch'en's translation sounds amateurish to this reader, as he/she finds it challenging to come to terms with the long list of vernacular terms left untranslated, anglicized sentences, and stiff word-for-word rendering. Similar criticisms regarding the quality of Ch'en's rendition can also be found on another Chinese-language online forum, on which readers posted comments like "譯製片語氣 [...] 讀得好糾結 [It reminded me of those cheesy dubbed foreign films [...] I felt so confused when reading the translation]" (simaosmall 7 September 2011, my translation) and "這個譯本也不算很好 [This translation is not that good as well]" (青木魚 *Qingmuyu* 12 March 2014, my translation). It might be due to these unfavorable comments from the public, as well as the critical remarks from academia, that a new translation of Ensler's play was needed.

Aside from the deficiencies in Ch'en's translation, multiple updates to the original text could be another reason for publishing a new Chinese translation. Since *The Vagina Monologues* first

came out in 1998, Eve Ensler has been promoting the V-Day movement⁴ and revising her play based on her experience of travelling to places such as the Congo, Pakistan, Macedonia, Egypt, and Morocco. In 2001, a new section called “V-Day”, which consisted of Karen Obel’s narrative of her experience as the director of the V-Day College Initiative and letters from student participants expressing a heightened feminist awareness, and a V-Day promotion page were added to the original book. The tenth anniversary edition of *The Vagina Monologues*, which was published in 2008, includes five new monologues written by Ensler “for a V-Day Spotlight or a situation in the world where women were totally at risk, where they had been raped or murdered or dismissed or simply not allowed to be” (Ensler 2008:127). Since the newly-added monologues are based on Ensler’s interviews with under-represented female communities such as Muslim women (“The Memory of Her Face”), transgender people (“They Beat the Girl out of My Boy ... Or so They Tried”), and indigenous women (“Crooked Braid”), adding them to the original play demonstrates the multiplicity and openness of Ensler’s work and refutes scholars and activists who criticize *The Vagina Monologues* for “mobiliz[ing] a colonialist discourse” (Hall 2005:103) and failing to acknowledge an American-centric interpretation of other women’s lives and what counts as violence against women (Cooper 2007:738-739). In addition to that, “Say It”—one of the spotlight monologues told from the perspective of comfort women—is closely associated with Taiwanese women’s rights campaigns that aspire to bring justice to approximately 1,000 to 2,000⁵ じゅうぐん-いあんふ, *jugun ianfu* [comfort women joining the army] in Taiwan. These revisions and updates that enriched the original play and created an international feminist solidarity have also invited a new translation of Ensler’s work.

In 2014, a new Chinese translation of *The Vagina Monologues* was published by Psygarden in collaboration with 勵馨基金會 *Lixin jijinhui* [Garden of Hope Foundation]. Translated by Ting Fan and Ch’iao Se-fen, the 2014 version is not only more updated than the 2000 one, as it is based on the tenth anniversary edition of Ensler’s book, but also more of a real theater script. In fact, although Ch’en’s version is the first Chinese translation of Ensler’s play that got published, theater companies and groups in Taiwan have never used that translation when they put *The Vagina Monologues* on stage. Instead, before 2014, Yu Rongjun’s translation, which was

⁴ It is a global activist movement to end violence against all women and girls.

⁵ <https://apjff.org/2018/08/Ward.html> (accessed April 2019).

published in China in 2003, was frequently adapted and used by commercial and non-commercial theater groups in Taiwan, including the Garden of Hope Foundation that has been sponsoring Taiwanese V-Day since 2005. Therefore, the lack of a quasi-stage translation done by Taiwanese translators could also account for the publication of the 2014 translation, which served as a form of “participatory theatre” (Cheng 2009:32) by bringing a more performative text to the reader and generating constant dialogues.

4. When vaginas speak Chinese: more than translators’ interventions

As a classical piece of feminist writing on women’s bodies, sexualities, and eroticism, *The Vagina Monologues* stirs up public discussion and consciousness about violence against women and patriarchal control over women’s rights. The play, as several scholars have pointed out, advocates a feminist awareness through its “transgressive and carnivalesque public stance” (Bell and Reverby 2005:433) and “lyrical, poignant, charming, romantic, tragic, vulgar, sentimental, raunchy and exhilarating” power (Pollitt 2001). If performing *The Vagina Monologues* in English has already required profound commitment, (re-)translating the play into another language is even more challenging. Ch’en Ts’ang-to, Ting Fan, and Ch’iao Se-fen employ different lexical and semantic strategies in their respective translations for the purpose of politicizing the female body and sexuality. Likewise, the publishers choose different blurbs and covers for the translations to make them align with the changing political messages expressed in the second wave of Taiwanese feminism. Instead of validating the “retranslation hypothesis” (Desmidt 2009:671; Deane-Cox 2014:4-5), I argue that those nebulously connected translational activities bring about a variety of representations of the source text and its specificities.

Shocked at First Sight

One of the most palpable—and paradoxically subtle—differences between Ch’en’s translation and Ting and Ch’iao’s lies in the title. The nuanced phrase *The Vagina Monologues* is translated as 陰道獨語 *Yindao duyü* by Ch’en and 陰道獨白 *Yindao dubai* by Ting and Ch’iao. While both the two groups of translators choose the same Chinese word for vagina, a word that engenders subversity and multiple interpretations, their renderings of *monologues* differ, with Ch’en using a literary term and Ting and Ch’iao a standard theatrical one.

In his translator's notes, Ch'en reveals his rationale for choosing 陰道 *yindao* [female passage/hidden passage] as the corresponding term in Chinese for *vagina*. He explains that “就 [...] 性器官的中文用語而言，「膺」也許太專門，而「雞巴」又太粗俗，所以「陰道」應是可以接受的字語 [Among the many Chinese terms for the lady parts, *zhi* might sound too technical, while *jiba*⁶ too coarse. *Yindao*, I think, would be accepted by my audience]” (Ch'en 2000:3, my translation). The most fitting Chinese translation for *vagina*, according to Ch'en, is 陰道 *yindao*, a word with a neutral semantic connotation. Unlike the archaic word 膺 *zhi* or the sexually vulgar term 雞巴 *jiba*, 陰道 *yindao* bypasses the linguistic taboo in the Chinese language. Moreover, Chinese speakers in the late 1990s were aware of the term yet would rarely say it aloud in public, just like most of their English counterparts who “spoke [terms like *vagina*, *labia*, *vulva*, or *clitoris*] rarely and in a hushed voice” (Steinem 1998:xxvii). Also illustrated in the translator's note is Ch'en's intention of choosing a corresponding Chinese term that can also be molded into a double entendre, as he writes “「陰道」似乎提供了一道門道 [*Yindao* seems to offer us a passage]” (Ch'en 2000:4, my translation). On the surface, 陰道 *yindao*—the word itself—almost certainly refers to the female genitalia that have long been a taboo object in the Sinophone world. Yet, Ch'en provides the reader with a non-normative interpretation that associates 陰道 *yindao* with 門道 *mendao* [passage/solution/a way out/approach]. Since 陰 *yin* sometimes correlates to women or femininity and 道 *dao* means method, doctrine, or path depending on the context, the Chinese term for female genitals, therefore, can also be interpreted as the female approach, or to put it more metaphorically, women's knowledge. By creating the double-entendre in his translation, Ch'en highlights the subversiveness of Ensler's play, which aims to debunk the heteropatriarchal view of the female body and aligns with the activist agenda of exposing sexual violence against women in second-wave Taiwanese feminism.

In their 2014 translation, Ting and Ch'iao keep 陰道 *yindao* as the corresponding Chinese word for *vagina* in the title. Although the two translators do not offer any explanations regarding their decision-making, their rationale might be inferred from the foreword attached to the 2014 Chinese version. The foreword, written by a representative from the Garden of Hope Foundation

⁶ Ch'en's mention of 雞巴 *jiba* is questionable here, in that it is one of the Mandarin Chinese terms for penis. This could be an oversight on either the translator's part or the editor's part.

that has endorsed Taiwanese V-Day and is the sponsor of the new translation, relates a dire experience: “曾有媒體來採訪「陰道獨白」演出記者會，播出的畫面，居然把拍到的背板「陰道」兩字上了馬賽克，訪談中談到陰道兩個字，也被自動消音了 [In the news coverage of our performance of *Yindao dubai*, the word *yindao* was completely censored! *Yindao* on our posters was pixelated. When someone said the word, it was bleeped out on TV]” (Chi 2014:10). Illustrated by this unsettling episode is the heart-breaking fact that one decade after Ch'en's translation of *The Vagina Monologues* was published and feminist activists strove to promote gender equality, the vagina still remained an “unmentionable area” (Steinem 1998:xxix) and the word *vagina* an unspeakable one. Given this socio-cultural scenario, Ting and Ch'iao's use of 陰道 *yindao* carries a double implication. On the one hand, it echoes Ch'en's translation and contributes to the accumulation of female knowledge. On the other hand, it deconstructs the linguistic sign in a manner different from Ch'en's. 道 *dao*, instead of referring to some certain method or path, denotes the act of speech, or simply, to speak. Thus, 陰道 *yindao* can be understood as the vagina's voice or the vagina speaks. Such an interpretation corresponds more incisively to Ensler's agenda, which she eloquently puts as “I say it [vagina] because I want to someday feel comfortable saying it, and not ashamed and guilty [...] I say ‘vagina’ because I want people to respond” (Ensler 2008a:xl-xli).

If using the word 陰道 *yindao*, which some conservatives find shocking in a book title, demonstrates the three translators' agency and their activist stance on women's rights and heteropatriarchy, the difference that one finds between the title of the 2000 translation and that of 2014 exhibits the valence of “the powers that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature (Lefevere 1992:12). Although the first decade of the new millennium was considered as the mainstreaming stage of second-wave Taiwanese feminism (Chou 2018:136), both academic and public feminist groups and women's movement participants were nevertheless faced with challenges that prevented them from demystifying the female body and fighting domestic violence against women. Likewise, a subversive text like *The Vagina Monologues* was not able to make its way to a Sinophone patriarchal society without the translators' and the publishers' interventions.

In the 2000 translation, Ch'en translates *monologues* as 獨語 *duyu*, a literary term in Chinese that means speaking one's thoughts to oneself. More of an equivalent to the English word *soliloquy*, 獨語 *duyu* suggests a more introverted disposition than *monologues* does and linguistically mitigates the activist stance embedded in the original text. Under the interlinear title, however, is a blurb that says 讓她說說話 *rang ta shuo shuo hua* [Let her speak]. This particular line, although in a much smaller font, channels a feminist awareness to the reader, as it implicitly reminds them of the ubiquity of women's silenced status and encourage them to embrace female knowledge. Ch'en's lexical choice and the paratextual evidence reveal the palimpsestically interwoven ideological components that implicitly shape the translation. As a professor of English at the National Chengchi University at that time, Ch'en could not have been blind to the fact that academic feminism in Taiwan was not free from disputes within academia. According to Ya-chen Chen's study of Taiwanese academy's reception of feminist thoughts, which includes her interviews with twenty-five Taiwanese feminist scholars, institutionalization of women's and gender studies and validation of feminist texts for pedagogy constantly succumbed to the academic hierarchy and conservatism. One interviewee in Chen's study discloses that one of her male colleagues did not regard women's writing "significant enough to be considered 'literature'" (Chen 2011:81), while some others point out that Taiwanese literary scholars were reluctant to deal with Chinese translations of Western publications (Chen 2011:80). Given the contested academic environment of the late 1990s, the subversiveness of the source text would have to be blunted had the translator wished to introduce *The Vagina Monologues* to Taiwanese (academic) readers. This might account for Ch'en's juxtaposition of 陰道 *yindao*, a rather shocking term, with 獨語 *duyu*, which signifies a mild stance. The activist blurb, however, indicates that New Rain, which published Ch'en's translation, shared the more progressive political agenda of many grassroots feminist organizations. Describing itself as 出版為人類文明的郵差 [the cultural messenger for human civilization], New Rain aimed at not only an academic audience, but also general participants of the anti-sexual harassment campaign and women's rights movements in the late 1990s.

Published in what some scholars call the "mainstreaming" (Chou 2018:136) stage of the second wave of Taiwanese feminism, the 2014 translation unapologetically adopts 獨白 *dubai* [an extended speech by one person addressing a large audience], the standard theatrical term in Wangtaolue Guo, *When Vaginas Speak Chinese: Mobilizing Feminism through Translation*, 1-25

Chinese for *monologues*, in its title. Interestingly, except in Ch'en's 2000 translation, the title of Ensler's play has long been translated as 陰道獨白 *yindao dubai* in a few reader's theater scripts.⁷ One of the reasons that Ting and Ch'iao decide to use 獨白 *dubai*, instead of 獨語 *duyu*, could be that the collocation 陰道獨白 *yindao dubai* is more widely accepted by and recognizable to the audience. They may also intend to distinguish their translation from Ch'en's by signaling a difference in the title. In addition to that, Ting and Ch'iao's translation features on its cover a portrait of Eve Ensler under the interlinear title and a backdrop that resembles both flower petals and theater curtains. While embodying the central subject in the play, such a design blatantly challenges the patriarchal code in Taiwan and highlights the performative nature of Ensler's play by promoting the unspeakable vagina politics. By making the book title bold and blatantly showcasing a symbol that represents the female genitalia, Ting and Ch'iao's translation overthrows the dominant discourse of the public and the private and makes it clear that the power of *The Vagina Monologues* comes from its "transgressive and carnivalesque public stance" (Bell and Reverby 2005:433); that is, the power lies in the process of talking and sharing in public rather than reading in private. This explicit political note continues to echo the grassroots feminist attempts at combating gendered violence in Taiwan.

Vagina in (non-)translation

Opening with a cryptic line "I bet you're worried" (Ensler 2008a:3), the very first monologue immediately taps into the anxiety and social taboos that surround the play's subject matter: vaginas. One of the reasons for which Ensler "say[s] [vagina] one hundred and twenty-eight times every evening" (2008a:xxxix) she performs her show, as the playwright herself reveals in the preface, is that the shame and embarrassment that one feels when saying the word "has become a form of silencing [one's] desire, eroding [one's] ambition" (Ensler 2008a:xlili). Driven by the fact that taboos—be they linguistic or social—help perpetuate a culture of silence and violence against women, she ends the first monologue with a list of terms for female genitalia that she attempts to reclaim throughout the play.

⁷ The most widely circulated ones are Ai Xiaoming's 2003 translation and Yu Rongjun's 2003 translation.

Although rendering the taboo topics visible and speakable through the humorous display of the female body, the naming of various vaginal words from different groups of women ostensibly demonstrates that the very core of the play is the United States. The vernacular terms for the vagina are so area-specific that even the English speakers outside the U.S. might not recognize each and every one of them, let alone their cultural connotations. This form of feminist knowledge with its belief in American sisterhood poses a great challenge for Taiwanese translators to transpose the opening monologue into Mandarin Chinese.

The following excerpts demonstrate how part of Ensler's opening monologue is rendered respectively in the 2000 and 2014 Mandarin translations:

Ch'en's translation: 在新澤西州，人們稱陰道為 *twat*。除外，陰道還有以下的稱呼：*powderbox*（化粧盒——譯註，下同）、*derriere*（臀部）、*poochi*（小狗）、*poopi*（噗噗聲）、*peepe*（尿）、*poopelu*、*poonani*、*pal*（朋友）、*piche*、*toadie*（小蟾蜍）、*dee dee*、*nishi* [...] (Ensler 1998:31).

[In New Jersey, they call vagina *twat*. There are other names for vagina: *powderbox* (makeup box—translator's note, the same below), *derriere* (bottom), *poochi* (little dog), *poopi* (the sound of puff), *peepe* (urine), *poopelu*, *poonani*, *pal* (friend), *piche*, *toadie* (little toad), *dee dee*, *nishi* [...]] (my back translation; italics are used to indicate the words in English in the Chinese translation).

Ting and Ch'iao's translation: 在紐澤西，叫它 *twat*。還有其他叫法：*powderbox*（粉盒）、*derrière*（臀部）、*poochi*（狗兒）、*poopi*、*peepe*（尿）、*poopelu*、*poonani*、*pal*（朋友）、*piche*（小狗）、*toadie*（蟾蜍）、*dee dee*、*nishi* [...] (Ensler 2008b:43-44).

[In New Jersey, it is called *twat*. Some other names include: *powderbox* (a box for beauty powder), *derrière* (bottom), *poochi* (puppy), *poopi*, *peepe* (urine), *poopelu*, *poonani*, *pal* (friend), *piche* (doggie), *toadie* (toad), *dee dee*, *nishi* [...]] (my back translation; italics are used to indicate the words in English in the Chinese translation).

This is an interesting case against a Bermanian logic that retranslation possesses “restorative, corrective and illuminating properties” (Deane-Cox 2014:3). The two groups of translators both leave the English terms untranslated, while providing the dictionary meanings of a few selected words in brackets in the form of translator's notes. Their bilingual renderings, which are highly foreignized regarding the form, have been criticized by scholars for managing to convey the least

information to the monolingual reader. Zhongli Yu, who has done a comprehensive study on feminist translation in China, contends that “the English terms retained in Chen’s⁸ translations are merely strange terms with strange pronunciations to Chinese readers or audiences unless they are bilingual” (2015:108). By comparing Ch’en Ts’ang-to’s translation with another two Mandarin translations of *The Vagina Monologues* published in China, in which the translators rewrite the prelude and adapt it to a Chinese context, she concludes that Ch’en’s version lacks a feminist stance and fails to transmit feminism to the Sinophone audience.

Admittedly, Yu’s point about the limited reception of Ch’en’s translation is well-founded, in that the bilingual rendering disrupts a smooth reading of the monologue by requiring the monolingual reader to go back and forth from time to time. Her remarks about the lack of feminist intervention in the translation, however, turns out to be hasty. By including the long list of vaginal terms, the prelude addresses what Michele Hammers calls the themes of “negative amplification and erasure” (2006:227). When reading the English original, one may easily detect negative amplification in the juxtaposition of taboos and euphemism (for instance, the juxtaposition of “twat,” an offensive way of referring to vulva, and “derrière,” a French word that refers to the bottom). One may, at the same time, develop a sense of estrangement as more and more idiosyncratic names for female genitalia start to appear. An anonymous reader recounts an interesting finding when she first heard the word *nishi*: “When I googled Nishi, it showed up as a Japanese surname and an Indian first name. It’s Sankrit [sic] for Night. So I googled Nishi along with Vagina and all I got was a compiled list of words for vagina from *The Vagina Monologues*. No history. No background. No origins” (“The Nishi Monologue” 21 October 2009). Even for native English speakers, Ensler’s text creates an impression of unfamiliarity. Moreover, it implicitly reveals the fact that it is precisely the dominant patriarchal discourse that objectifies female genitals as something unspeakable/unmentionable, thus erasing the multiple linguistic symbols from the rhetorical repertoire. Given the political agenda in the original, both Ch’en’s and Ting and Ch’iao’s highly foreignized renditions will be examined in a different light. By leaving the English words in the translation and providing the reader with corresponding dictionary meanings in brackets, the Taiwanese translators respectively produce a text that

⁸ Yu is referring to Ch’en Ts’ang-to here. The inconsistency in spelling is resulted from the differences between two romanization systems for Mandarin Chinese. Instead of Wade-Giles, Yu uses Pinyin in her article.

resembles a gloss translation, which closely aligns with the original form. Yet at the same time, both translations engender a sense of bewilderment, as the original text does to the source-language reader, in the target-language reader since the terms are not exactly translated, but cross-referenced to one another in a more or less implicit way. Such a gesture, I argue, signals that both translated texts challenge a male-centered perspective on decoding literary texts by deliberately deviating from the mainstream reading habit and encouraging the reader to search for the female knowledge that has long been forgotten.

Nevertheless, there are indeed a few problematic issues that exist in Ch'en's translation, which Ting and Ch'iao fix later in their version. When it comes to translating place names, Ch'en's fails to keep it consistent throughout his translation. For instance, he translates "Great Neck" literally into Chinese as "大頸 *da jin* [big neck]", yet transliterates "Westchester" as "威斯徹斯特 *Wei si che si te*" just a few lines later. In this specific case, not only does 大頸 sound preposterous in Chinese, but also the inconsistency may pose difficulties for the curious readers when they set out to find those places on a map. In Ting and Ch'iao version, the translators consistently adopt transliteration—a more widely used technique—for place names. They also include the original English names in brackets for further reference. In a similar vein, Ch'en's constant switch between bilingual translation and "zero translation" (Yu 2015:108) could leave a general audience in confusion. Ting and Ch'iao, although using the same strategies, insert a footnote to explain their rationale: "以下皆為稱呼陰道的俚語或用法，此處保留原文，並以括弧標註中文涵義；狀聲詞及名字則不譯出 [What follows is a list of slang and phrases for vagina. Here, we kept the English words in our translation, while providing you with the corresponding Chinese definitions in brackets. However, we left untranslated certain onomatopoeic words and proper nouns]" (2014:43). With this translators' note, the reader gains a better understanding of not only the specific quality of each word but also the translators' implicit intervention.

What Happened to "Down There" in Translation?

In addition to reclaiming vaginal terms and reconfiguring the female body as properly public, *The Vagina Monologues* also brings to light the upsetting fact that women have been continually visited by violence; more devastatingly, the violence is constantly directed at the vagina. This political agenda is ostensibly revealed by Ensler's activist statement in her introduction to the *Wangtaolue Guo, When Vaginas Speak Chinese: Mobilizing Feminism through Translation*, 1-25

tenth anniversary edition of *The Vagina Monologues* that the play is meant to “ma[ke] violence against women abnormal, extraordinary, unacceptable” (Ensler 2008a:xx). Moreover, several monologues in the play, such as “Hair,” “My Vagina Was My Village,” and “The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could,” further highlight that ending sexual violence against women should become the focal point of feminist movements in the new millennium.

The issue of gendered violence illustrated in Ensler’s play, however, did not only apply to the U.S. at the end of the twentieth century. As I have explained earlier, sexual harassment on campus and domestic violence were under the spotlight in Taiwan at almost the same time. According to Wang Ya-ko (2001:122), several male professors were accused of sexual misconduct and fired by their institutions from 1995 to 1997. In 1996, the rape and assassination of Peng Wan-ju, a feminist politician, sparked multiple feminist campaigns fighting for women’s safety and autonomy. Since the end of the twentieth century, concerns about ending violence against women have never ceased in Taiwanese society. The comfort women controversy, for instance, has continually been a heated topic in the public discourses of social justice and gendered violence.

It is safe to say that both Ch’en’s translation of *The Vagina Monologues* and Ting and Ch’iao’s retranslation aim at validating feminist ideology and endorsing Taiwanese feminist activism. The translators, however, deal with descriptions of sexual violence in the text in divergent ways. Ch’en is fairly restrained from laying bare the sexual violence against women depicted in the play, while Ting and Ch’iao are more attentive to details and attempt to bring to the light the physical and psychological trauma of being sexually assaulted. For instance, in the monologue titled “hair,” Ensler accounts the story of a woman who used to shave her vagina to please her husband. When her husband makes love to her, her hairless vagina “felt the way a beard must feel. It felt good to rub it, and painful. Like scratching a mosquito bite. It felt like it was on fire” (Ensler 2008a:9). Ch’en translates the sentences as “我的陰道感覺起來像鬍子給我的感覺。摩擦它時，感覺起來很好，有點疼痛，像是搔蚊子咬過的地方” (Ensler 1998:34). This seemingly precise rendition, in fact, creates ambiguity and downplays the degree of male intrusion, as Ch’en translates “painful” as “有點疼痛 [it hurt a bit]” and “like scratching a mosquito bite” as “像是搔蚊子咬過的地方 [like rubbing the place where a mosquito bit me]. In

Ting and Ch'iao's rendition, the sentence goes like “我的陰道就像是剛刮過鬍鬚的下巴，摩擦它時產生的刺痛就像是抓破了蚊子叮咬的地方” (Ensler 2008b:46). Unlike Ch'en, who highlights the pleasurable sensation (“感覺起來很好 [it felt so good]”) while playing down the unpalatable one (“有點疼痛 [it hurt a bit]”), Ting and Ch'iao emphasize the pain and the humility that this woman experiences from exposing her hairless vagina to her husband in their translation by omitting a part of the original—“[i]t felt good to rub it” (Ensler 2008a:9)—and making it blatant that the sensation resembles the prickling when one cuts his or her skin slightly with nails (“像是抓破了蚊子叮咬的地方 [it felt like I cut my skin with my nails when scratching a mosquito bite]”). Although their rendition is not, technically speaking, faithful to the original, Ting and Ch'iao, in fact, do grasp the central ideas of this particular monologue, which is to expose domestic violence—no matter how “insignificant” it seems—and encourage women to take control of their own bodies. Such messages do not only correspond to the ideologies of the second wave of Taiwanese feminism, but also align with the social agendas of the sponsor of the 2014 retranslation. In the foreword of the 2014 retranslation, Chi Hui-jung, a representative from the Garden of Hope Foundation, points out that the translators' lexical and semantic choices are meant to create a feminist sorority, helping the contemporary Taiwanese women rediscover their own desires and bodies (2014:8-9). Furthermore, in this particular context of feminist translation, Ting and Ch'iao's “perfidious” rendition also challenges the gender politics of translation itself, in that the translated text, in a way, overthrows the entrenched paternity of the original.

Such difference in word choice and the various affects that each word embodies can also be found in the translations of “My Vagina Was My Village”:

ST: *Not since the soldiers put a long thick rifle inside me. So cold, the steel rod canceling my heart. [...] Not since they took turns for seven days smelling like feces and smoked meat, they left their dirty sperm inside me* (Ensler 2008a:62-63; italics in original).

Ch'en's translation: 自從那些士兵把一把又長又粗的槍放進我的身體裡面，我就沒有去觸碰。那麼冷，那鋼條抹煞了我的心。[...] 自從他們七天輪流進行，散發出像排泄物和燻肉的氣味，把骯髒的精液留在我身體裡面，我就沒有去觸碰。(Ensler 1998:73-74)

[Since those soldiers put a long and thick gun into my body, I have not touched it. So cold, that iron rod wiped out my heart. [...] Since they, for seven days, took turns to do things, emanating smells of feces and smoked meat and leaving their dirty sperm inside me, I have not touched it] (my back translation).

Ting and Ch'iao's translation: 直到那些士兵把又長又粗的步槍插入我的身體。那冰冷的槍桿讓我心如死灰。[...] 直到他們輪流地摧殘了我七天，聞起來像是排泄物和燻肉，他們把骯髒的精液留在我的體內。(Ensler 2008b:94-95)

[Not since those soldiers thrust a long and thick rifle into my body. That freezing rod burned my heart to ashes. [...] Not since they took turns to ravish me for seven days, smelling like feces and smoked meat, they left their dirty sperm inside me] (my back translation).

Based on Ensler's interview with a woman from the former Yugoslavia, this monologue portrays the terrible atrocities committed by aggressors, especially women's dire experiences of being assaulted and raped during times of war. Both groups of translators render the cruel phallic reference (“又長又粗的槍 [a long and thick gun]”/“又長又粗的步槍 [a long and thick rifle]”) and the unpleasant analogies (“散發出像排泄物和燻肉的氣味 [emanate smells of feces and smoked meat]”/“聞起來像是排泄物和燻肉 [smell like feces and smoked meat]”) as literally as possible, conveying the exact source text meaning and developing a sense of empathy. Yet when comparing the two translations line by line, I argue that Ting and Ch'iao's version offers a more excruciating narrative that details the passive female body in a patriarchal context. Instead of “放進我的身體裡面 [put into my body]”, Ting and Ch'iao choose a much more violent phrase “插入我的身體 [thrust into my body]” to describe the soldiers' inhumane assault on the woman. Unlike Ch'en, who euphemistically translates “they took turns for seven days” as “他們七天輪流進行 [they, for seven days, took turns to do things],” the translators of the 2014 version make very explicit the soldiers' bestial lust by pointing out that “他們輪流地摧殘了我七天 [they took turns to ravish me for seven days].” By amplifying the traumatic experience that a Bosnian woman came across during the war, Ting and Ch'iao's rendition implicitly corresponds to a women's rights campaign started as early as 2004 that aspired to bring justice to Taiwanese comfort women, many of whom shared stories similar to the one recounted in “My Vagina Was My Village.” Even though this specific episode documents the heinous barbarities that women in Europe suffered during the Yugoslav Wars, Ting and Ch'iao are able to localize that wartime experience by highlighting the details of gendered violence shared by the Taiwanese comfort

women. Gang rape, for instance, is one of the brutalities that comfort women in Taiwan always mention in interviews and oral accounts (Ward 2018:4-5). Along with the rifle as a penile reference, the translators of the 2014 version manage to unearth the pertinent Taiwanese memories, create an affective space, and remind their target readers of the trauma faced by women during the Sino-Japanese War.

5. Conclusion

In her introduction to the tenth anniversary edition of *The Vagina Monologues*, Eve Ensler reflects upon the interrelations between art and activism as follows: “The art has made the activism more creative and bold, the activism has made the art more sharply focused, more grounded, more dangerous” (2008a:xii-xiii). Indeed, *The Vagina Monologues*, through exercising its seismic theatrical energy, has contributed significantly to the demystification of the female body and sexuality and the deconstruction of violence against women. Yet, it is through the aesthetic and political act of translation, which polyphonizes the original play, that Ensler’s activist messages reach the global system of feminist solidarity.

In this article, I have demonstrated the key role that translation has been playing in the context of promoting local, Sinicized feminist agendas in Taiwan and establishing a transnational feminist solidarity. Translators and other translational agents (publishers, critics, activists, etc.) who are involved in the dissemination of feminist texts and discourses such as *The Vagina Monologues* act as “power brokers” (Collins 2017:xiii). They have been constantly redefining the entrenched linguistic, cultural, and ideological borders by negotiating local and global issues such as female knowledge, body and sexual politics, and gendered violence, articulating resistance to the inveterate gender hierarchy in Taiwan, facilitating the introduction of Western feminism, and initiating cross-border dialogues. My comparative analysis of Ch’en 2000 and Ting and Ch’iao’s 2014 translations of Ensler’s play also reveals that translations that are produced in different historical contexts and situated in distinctive socio-cultural systems can find themselves complementing and confronting one another. It is true that retranslation could happen because of the inherent flaws of translation itself, yet various translations of an evolving source text constitute a “spiral-like and vertiginous” (Susam-Sarajeva 2003:6) translational paradigm and augment the interpretive space. Finally, as feminist knowledge and praxis continue to grow

around the globe, translation will remain a central aspect of gender politics. Mooting the cross-cultural transactions of feminist texts can not only contribute to the conceptualization of transnational feminism, but also uphold an epistemological openness of the theoretical term.

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